DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 350 521 CG 024 575

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TITLE A Survey of Psychology Alumni: What They Did with a Bachelor's Degree.
PUB DATE [90]
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Alumni; *Bachelors Degrees; *Graduates; Graduate Surveys; Higher Education; *Psychology; *Undergraduate Study; *Vocational Followup

ABSTRACT

In this study a survey of alumni (N=68) with bachelor's degrees in psychology graduating in the past 10 years from the University of Wisconsin-Platteville (UW-P) was conducted. The results of the study indicated that the majority of graduates began their careers in the clinical/counseling field, but as time progressed the majority of them were employed in business. Perhaps this was due to the low salaries of master's level clinical/counseling positions and that graduates start in that area to gain experience and not for the monetary benefits. Less than 50% of the alumni participated in an internship, but those who did rated it well above average. The mean salary is slightly misleading. Of the alumni who were earning more than $30,000 all were employed in the business area except for two (one was a deputy sheriff and the other was self-employed). This study also showed that alumni were generally not satisfied with their research experience and career information provided. The UW-P Psychology Department needs to make more research opportunities available to students as well as provide them with more career information. The study's subjects may not have been a representative sample and therefore the results may be biased. (ABL)

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A SURVEY OF PSYCHOLOGY ALUMNI: WHAT THEY DID WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE

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Running Head: ALUMNI SURVEY

CG024575

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ABSTRACT

A survey of University of Wisconsin-Platteville psychology alumni graduating in the past ten years was conducted. Sixty-eight alumni (32%) completed the survey. Results indicate a good overall opinion of the education received at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville and that a majority psychology students do not continue their education by attending graduate school.

A SURVEY OF PSYCHOLOGY ALUMNI: WHAT THEY DID WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE

What do graduates with a bachelors degree in psychology do after graduation? Do they attend graduate school? Do they find employment? Do they work in an area related to psychology? These questions, as well as many others, are asked by many psychology students. In the present study an alumni survey was conducted to try to answers these questions.

Ware and Meyer (1981) found that more than half of Creighton University (Omaha, Nebraska) psychology graduates obtain some additional formal education. Fulkerson (1990) found that almost 80% of Western Illinois University (Macomb) graduates had pursued additional coursework since earning their undergraduate degree. Related to this, Sensenig and Pinto (1990) found that 58% of Morningside College (Sioux City, IA) alumni reported having applied to graduate school with 63% of those who had applied actually attending graduate school. However, Harper (1988) found that only 10% of graduates enter graduate school in psychology programs and 20% enter other graduate programs. Sheirer and Rogers in 1985 found that 47% of undergraduates nationally are concerned with gaining employment after graduation and not concerned about entering graduate school as stated by Parker, Hedl, & Chan (1988).

For those graduates who decide to not pursue graduate school and to secure employment, the most frequently mentioned jobs by psychology graduates were in the social services, (Fulkerson, 1990; Wise, Smith, & Fulkerson, 1983; McGovern & Carr, 1989) business, (McGovern & Carr, 1989) and education

(Fulkerson, 1990). Harper (1988) found that only 10% of psychology graduates are employed in a psychology-related job and 60% are in jobs not related to psychology. However, other research has shown that the majority of psychology majors eventually are employed in jobs related to psychology (Sensenig & Pinto, 1990) and Ware, et al. (1981) found that psychology graduates are found in a variety of professional ranks. In Fulkerson's (1990) 1987 survey, it was found that 41.3% of Western Illinois University alumni were employed in a job that was related to their psychology training.

METHOD

Subjects and Procedures

An informational cover sheet and a questionnaire were mailed to 211 University of Wisconsin-Platteville (UW-P) psychology alumni who graduated between May 1981 and May 1990. A total of 68 surveys were returned for a response rate of 32.2%. Of those who responded, 51 were females and 17 were males.

Materials and Design

Respondents were asked their overall undergraduate GPA, their psychology GPA, their major(s) and minor(s), and career goals at graduation. The alumni were asked to answer questions about their participation in an internship program, graduate school information, and employment information. The alumni were also asked to rate, on a scale, the helpfulness of Psychology Club, their experienced gained and usefulness of their internship, their current job satisfaction, and five questions on their undergraduate psychology education. These questions included their cooperative field experience (internship),

research experience, theoretical coverage, career information provided, and general information obtained.

RESULTS

The results indicate that of the 68 alumni who returned the survey the mean GPA was 3.21 overall and the mean psychology GPA was 3.48 (on a 4.00 scale). Thirty-five percent of the respondents had double majors with the most common other major being Criminal Justice (54%). Thirty-two percent had a minor and Business Administration was the most prevalent (36%). Thirty-eight percent were currently doing what their career goals at graduation were. Sixteen percent were members of Psi Chi and 34% were members of the Psychology Club.

Forty-seven percent participated in an internship (see Table 1). Forty-three percent applied to graduate school with 40% actually attending graduate school. The respondents who applied to graduate school applied to a mean of 1.5 graduate schools and were accepted at a mean of 1.2 schools. Forty-one percent of the alumni continued their education at UW-P, 22% went to the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the remaining attended graduate school elsewhere (see Table 2).

Insert Tables 1 & 2 about here

Sixty percent were involved in some area of psychology in their first job (see Table 3). The mean starting salary was $17,382 per year. Forty-six percent were currently involved in some area of psychology (see Table 4). The

mean current salary was $26,640 per year.

Insert Tables 3 & 4 about here

Respondents were also asked to rate a variety of items on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent. The results from those questions are presented Table 5.

Insert Table 5 about here

DISCUSSION

What UW-P alumni did as undergraduates to gain admission into a graduate program was one goal of this study. Another goal was to discover what alumni were currently doing and if they were involved in an area of psychology.

The majority of graduates begin their careers in the clinical/counseling field, but as time progresses the majority of them are employed in business. Perhaps this is due to the low salaries of master's level clinical/counseling positions and that graduates start in that area to gain experience and not for the monetary benefits. Less that 50% of the alumni participated in an internship, but those who did rated it well above average. Faculty need to stress just how much experience can be gained by participating in an internship and encourage more students to participate in them.

The mean current salary is slightly misleading. Of the alumni who are earning more than $30,000 all are employed in the business area except for two

(one is a deputy sheriff and the other is self-employed). This study also shows that alumni were generally not satisfied with their research experience and career information provided. The UW-P Psychology Department needs to make more research opportunities available to students as well as provide them with more career information.

Finally, one must be careful in generalizing these findings to all of UW-P psychology alumni and psychology alumni in general. Perhaps the 32% who responded were not a representative sample and therefore the results may be biased; obviously a larger sample size would be desirable.

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Author Notes

We wish to acknowledge Shari Engel and Bill Miller for their helpful comments concerning the design of the alumni survey.

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TABLE 1

Internship Areas of Participation

Clinical/Counseling	15 (47%)
Human Services	6 (19%)
Group Homes	5 (16%)
Criminal Justice	2 (6%)
Business	1 (3%)
Forensics	1 (3%)
Geriatric	1 (3%)
School Psychology	1 (3%)

n = 32 (47.1% of respondents)

TABLE 2

Graduate School Areas of Study

Counseling	10 (42%0
Psychology	4 (17%)
Social Worker	3 (13%)
Industrial Technology	2 (8%)
Advertising	1 (4%)
Communication and Family	1 (4%)
Education	1 (4%)
Human Resource	1 (4%)
Human Service	1 (4%)

n = 24 (40.1% of respondents)

TABLE 3

Areas of Psychology Involved in First Job

Clinical/Counseling	15 (37%)
Human Service	10 (24%)
Business	8 (20%)
Group Homes	4 (10%)
Corrections	1 (2%)
Geriatric	1 (2%)
Teaching	1 (2%)
Other	1 (2%)

n = 41 (60.3% of respondents)

TABLE 4

Areas of Psychology Involved in Current Job

Business	13 (42%)
Clinical/Counseling	7 (23%)
Human Service	6 (19%)
Group Homes	2 (6%)
Geriatric	1 (3%)
Teaching/School	1 (3%)

n = 31 (45.6% of respondents)

TABLE 5

Mean Responses for Scaled Items

Item	Mean
Helpfulness of Psi Chi/Psychology Club	3.1
Experienced gained from internship	4.2
Usefulness of internship for future employment	3.7
Current job satisfaction	4.0
Ratings of Psychology Education received:	
Cooperative Field Experience	3.1
Research experience	2.6
Theoretical coverage	3.9
Career information provided	2.5
General information obtained	3.8

Note: Higher scores indicate more positive experiences (scale scores ranged from 1 [poor] to 5 [excellent]).